

In Memoriam

Donald Lee Whaley
1934-1983

Where did he come from? The better one knew Don Whaley, the more likely that question became. It was a question about contingencies, not about geography.

Tall and slow-moving, with an expansive posture, the blond and bearded Whaley almost always captivated strangers within a minute or two. He listened, hard, to what they said. A tenderness in the eyes told them he understood. In a soft, gently intense voice, he invariably said something they had never heard before. Or something they suddenly understood for the first time in spite of having heard it many times. If they did not fear captivation, they stayed—for hours, or months, or years. The longer they stayed, the better they knew themselves and the more uncertain they became as to what they knew about him.

Don seemed to respond to cues that no one else saw or heard. Strangely abstract dimensions of behavioral consequences seemed to keep him in a situation or working on a problem—perversely, as he put it. No behavior analyst could be around him long and not begin to wonder what kind of history could account for the bundle of paradoxes that was Whaley.

Born August 17, 1934, Donald Lee was the oldest son of Hazel and Walter (“Dynamite”) Whaley of Bloomington, Indiana. Severely asthmatic, the sickly Donny was pampered by his sister Delores, less than 2 years his elder. He returned her care with a lifelong devotion to her welfare and, in turn, nurtured his 8 younger siblings with a cheerful and unstinting commitment modeled by Dynamite and Hazel. As his brother Bill recently said, “He could solve just about any problem; and if he couldn’t, he somehow made it bearable.”

In recalling events from his boyhood, Don provided leads for us to follow in

unraveling the web of contingencies supporting the behavior people found so mysterious. “One time my daddy sent me to the grocery with a ten dollar bill. You’ve got to understand that \$10 was a gold mine to us. Somehow I lost the money. I walked and walked and walked, praying to find it, dreading to tell my daddy it was gone. Finally, I went home and he said, ‘What’s the matter?’ I cried, ‘I lost the ten dollars!’ He said, ‘Why, son, that’s not the end of the world. It’s only money.’” The rims of his eyes reddened and a mist muted further the hazel color. “That was my daddy,” he said softly and with wonder.

From late 1978 through 1980, Don agonized over having to fight allegations made against him which appeared to derive from a small group of hostile faculty. In trying to put the situation into the framework of his life, he recalled another boyhood incident. “When I was a young boy, a kid down the street always tried to get me to fight. I kept saying I didn’t want to fight. He asked me if I was afraid. I told him no, but that I had no reason to fight him. He kept at me until I agreed and half-heartedly wrestled with him. He said, ‘You’re not trying! Come on!’ Pretty soon we were really fighting hard and he went away crying. When I got home my mother said that his mother had called to complain that I had hurt her son.” Don remained puzzled throughout his life as to why anyone wanted to fight with him.

A basketball scholarship and a number of odd jobs got Don through undergraduate school. After attending DePauw University in Indiana and Monterey Peninsula College and San Jose State in California, Don received his B.A. (1961) in psychology from Indiana University, where he met his wife, Elizabeth McGregor. Following the birth of their daughter Angella, the Whaleys moved to

Tallahassee where Don had been accepted for graduate training in clinical psychology at Florida State. For the first time, Don owned every book required in his courses.

Don became an ardent admirer of his major professor, Barron Scarborough, and did his dissertation on conditional punishment (established with x-irradiation) on bar pressing in Tamarin monkeys. Professor Scarborough remembers Don as a "straight-A student . . . a person with a fertile and creative mind, a person of unquestioned integrity who was a pure joy to work with." According to Scarborough, Don's standard of excellence is still a criterion measure used in judging performance of Florida State graduate students—some of whom still use the electronic devices collected by the pound by Don from government surplus warehouses.

After Don's clinical internship at the Veterans Hospital at Coral Gables, Florida, the Whaleys moved to Kalamazoo. As assistant professor at Western Michigan University, Don met Richard Malott and began a fruitful collaboration that resulted in several textbooks (including the immensely popular *Elementary Principles of Behavior*) and a plethora of projects that put Whaley and Malott in the first wave of behavior modifiers. Two more daughters, Shannon and Laura, were born.

Early in 1969, after three years at WMU, Whaley's physician told him that he would not likely survive many more Michigan winters. Don and Elizabeth moved their three girls to Denton, Texas, where he became the first radical behaviorist in the Psychology Department at North Texas State University (NTSU).

Don's tenure at NTSU is legendary. The young and the not so young, the marginal students and the gifted, the earnestly intellectual and the seekers of socials, the radicals and the merely rebellious—they came to hear him lecture even when they weren't taking his courses. They sought his counsel in solving their personal problems and making their career decisions. They learned about the science of behavior and took part in developing behavioral technology.

In 1970, Don founded the Center for Behavioral Studies when he supervised two graduate students' work with an autistic child whose desperate mother turned to him for help. Soon there were a dozen and then two dozen severely developmentally disabled (SDD) clients and 200 to 300 student volunteers, working in pairs and triplets each hour with each SDD client.

Literally dozens of faculty, staff, and administrators turned to Don for help with their children, husbands or wives, themselves—and their in-laws, cousins, and neighbors. Don organized the Behavior Exchange Clinic where a pyramid of students under his supervision helped people set up behavior management programs in exchange for their participation elsewhere in the system.

The 40-year-old Whaley was working day and night by 1974 when he and the Center for Behavioral studies split from the Psychology Department and became a service and research unit in the School of Community Service. Without an academic home or a curriculum, Whaley lost contact with most of the volunteer student population. The Center for Behavioral Studies operated with a professional and paraprofessional staff and a small cadre of students who each year managed to find him. When he died unexpectedly on October 27, 1983, of atherosclerotic heart disease, students were still coming to NTSU to study with Don only to find that was not possible.

Those of us fortunate enough to have been his students may never achieve his wisdom, his understanding of behavior as it occurs in the world around us, or his uncanny ability to see similarities in the most divergent phenomena; we may never be as open and honest with affection as was he. But we shall never forget his grandiosity or his humility, his joyful laugh or the sadness in his eyes, his anger or his resignation in the face of unremittent hostility. And we know well what he taught us best: DO WHAT IT TAKES.

Sigrid S. Glenn
North Texas State University